

VZCZCXRO0749  
PP RUEHDBU RUEHLN RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHTA #2718/01 2711015  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 281015Z SEP 07  
FM AMEMBASSY ASTANA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0830  
INFO RUEHAST/USOFFICE ALMATY  
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE 0264  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1829

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ASTANA 002718

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN (M. O'MARA)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KZ](#)

SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: CONFUSION SURROUNDS TREASON INVESTIGATION OF  
GRACE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH LEADERS

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11. (SBU) Summary: On August 24, Committee for National Security (KNB) agents raided the headquarters of the Grace Presbyterian Church in Karaganda, a Grace Church in Ust Kamenogorsk, and several church-owned private homes in Karaganda, seizing documents and computers and questioning church officials. The raid was part of a treason investigation involving the head of the church and several of his family members, as well as an Almaty businessman previously detained on treason charges. The Government of Kazakhstan has released few details about the investigation, and has forbidden those under investigation from discussing the case. On September 17, Karaganda regional procurators announced that investigators found illegal drugs, evidence of fraudulent property transfers, and materials that promote the superiority of one faith over another and instigate inter-faith discord. However, observers reported that these findings actually come from a completely unrelated investigation in Karaganda. So far, church officials have not been formally arrested or charged and the churches are able to hold services, though KNB investigators continue to question church leaders and congregation members. End summary.

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KNB RAIDS GRACE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES  
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12. (U) On August 24, KNB agents conducted a surprise 15-hour raid of the Grace Presbyterian Church headquarters in the central Kazakhstani city of Karaganda. On the same day, KNB agents also raided three church-owned private homes in Karaganda, and another Grace Church in the eastern Kazakhstani city of Ust Kamenogorsk. During the raid, agents searched the entire premises, forbade anyone from entering or leaving, and required those present to write statements. The agents also seized computers, church literature, documents, and accounting records. Following the raid, authorities summoned Archbishop Igor Kim, leader of the church for all of Kazakhstan, for further questioning.

13. (SBU) Details of the raid were first reported by the Forum 18 news service; Post confirmed details by speaking to a church official and Aleksandr Klyushev, chairman of the Association of Religious Organizations of Kazakhstan. Post's regular contacts in the Religious Issues Committee of the Ministry of Justice knew nothing of the investigation. The case has received very little media coverage, and KNB officials have thus far refused to comment on the investigation.

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RAID CONNECTED TO TREASON INVESTIGATION  
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14. (SBU) According to Klyushev and church members present during the raid, the authorities told church officials that the investigation is part of a treason investigation, apparently targeting Archbishop Kim, his sister, a church administrator, and the senior pastor of the church in Ust-Kamenogorsk, who is Kim's relative. Klyushev and church members were surprised by the allegations of treason, and had no information about the possible basis for any treason charge. Archbishop Kim and the others under investigation were instructed not to discuss the case publicly. Church members also reported that all Grace Church affiliates are now facing a tax investigation.

15. (SBU) Klyushev said the investigation is connected to an Almaty businessman previously detained on treason charges. According to some of the few press articles to appear on the investigation, the businessman is Sergei Tsoi. Tsoi is the owner of Kaztranscom Service, a construction company, and he allegedly defrauded investors in a large residential construction project in Almaty. Tsoi is currently in a pre-trial detention facility in Almaty.

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Klyushev and the press reports indicated that Tsoi allegedly made several large financial donations to the Grace Church. Klyushev was initially restrained in his public comments on the investigation, explaining that it appeared to be a financial investigation related to Tsoi rather than a case of religious persecution.

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LOCAL PROCURATORS CONFUSE THE SITUATION  
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16. (SBU) In a strange development, however, the Karaganda regional procurators' office released a statement on September 17 concerning the Grace Church investigation. The statement announced that authorities were investigating the presence of heavy psychotropic drugs at the church, several suspicious property transfers, and the presence of materials promoting the superiority of one faith over another and instigating inter-faith discord. In response to complaints by church members and the local Kazakhstan International Human Rights Bureau affiliate that investigators had committed

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procedural violations during their search and seizure, the statement said that procurators had reviewed the investigation and found no violations, and warned church members not to interfere. The statement did not reference the treason aspect of the investigation.

17. (SBU) According to Klyushev, the facts discussed by the procurators actually relate to an investigation at the Karaganda House for Old People, a home for the elderly affiliated with the Union of Baptist Churches and unrelated to the Grace Church. Vyacheslav Zhuravlev, vice president of the Union of Baptist Churches of Kazakhstan, confirmed that investigators had indeed found drugs in the home that were used to treat an elderly resident, and that the director of the home had made some mistakes in transferring some property. He said that procurators were mistaken in attributing these problems to the Grace Church, though he said that the Grace Church was one of many churches providing financial support to the home. Klyushev speculated that procurators deliberately linked the negative results of that investigation with the Grace Church in order to deflect criticism of the Grace Church investigation and erode public sympathy for the Grace Church.

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SO FAR, NO ARRESTS OR FORMAL CHARGES  
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18. (SBU) Authorities thus far have not revealed the basis for any treason investigation, and have not formally arrested or charged Kim or any church officials. Both of the churches that were raided continue to hold regular Sunday services, though church officials report that their operations have been hindered by the seizure of their computers and other materials. In addition, KNB officers continued to question church officials and congregation members about all aspects of the church and its operations.

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BACKGROUND ON THE GRACE CHURCH  
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¶9. (SBU) In the past, KNB officials have publicly criticized the Grace Church. On September 15, 2006, the deputy chief commander of the KNB Counter-Terrorism Center made a public statement in support of legislation to ban destructive sects and organizations like Scientologists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Grace Church.

¶10. (SBU) In April, Poloff visited the Grace Church headquarters in Karaganda and met with Archbishop Kim and his staff. The Grace Church is a protestant, evangelical Christian denomination. The first church was founded in Karaganda in 1991 by Korean-American missionary Joseph Yu, and the denomination in Kazakhstan has grown to just over 200 churches with approximately 12,000 regular attenders. (Note: After 14 years of living in Kazakhstan, the government denied Yu reentry into the country in 2005 for unspecified reasons. End note.)

¶11. (SBU) The church in Karaganda, with an attendance of 3000 every week, is the largest Grace Church and the second largest church in Kazakhstan. In many respects, the church building and separate headquarters facility resemble the operations of an American mega-church, with offices, classrooms, kitchen facilities, modern audiovisual, recording, and lighting equipment in the main sanctuary, and warehouse facilities for distribution of food and clothing to the needy. In addition, Grace Church sends missionaries throughout the former Soviet Union, and operates a seminary in Kazakhstan with 44 students and 50 interns.

¶12. (SBU) Kim said that the Grace Church is openly evangelistic, and Poloff noted several signs and posters in the main sanctuary encouraging the congregation to witness to their friends and neighbors and grow the number of Christians in Kazakhstan. Kim repeatedly praised President Nazarbayev and his policies, and said that the church prays for him every day during their morning prayer service. Nevertheless, Kim said that church affiliates occasionally encounter registration problems in different regions of the country. He also said that at least one of his staff members was an informant for law enforcement officials. He said the church was not bothered by the informant, because they had nothing to hide. At the time, Kim was optimistic about life in Kazakhstan and the future of the church, and was confident that God would protect them no matter what the government does.

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COMMENT  
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¶13. (SBU) Comment: The true nature of the case against Grace Church remains uncertain, though it is clear the investigation is

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proceeding very thoroughly and carries potentially very serious ramifications for the church and its leadership. Post will continue to monitor the situation carefully, particularly given past KNB comments about the church. End comment.

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